

Sundays with **CWM**

Devotional Book 2022

Rise to Life

1st Quarter
Jan - Mar



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Vision & Mission Statements

Our Vision

“Life-flourishing Communities, living out God’s promise of a New Heaven and a New Earth.”

This vision articulates CWM’s conviction that the life-giving alternative that characterised the mission of Jesus is the basis of our hope. In naming life-flourishing communities as our vision, CWM sees the unfolding of a restored and renewed creation, an experience of a different world in our lifetime, where human dignity is protected, poverty eradicated, climate catastrophe abated, ideologies of supremacy demolished and peace reigns. The vision statement captures the essence of subversive imagination of a different world, where the Earth and all that is in it serve and sustain all of God’s creation; and where the people of God envision this new life for now.

Our Mission

“Called in Christ to radical and prophetic discipleship, working in partnership with churches and the ecumenical community to resist life-denying systems, affirm peace, do justice and enable life-flourishing communities.”

In our theology statement we declare that “We seek, as an organisation and as a partnership of churches, a life rooted in obedience to God’s mission focused on:

Rising with the risen Jesus whose resurrection is insurrection and proclamation that Babylon is as fallen as the tomb is empty; and

Responding in radical discipleship where we live out the New Heaven and New Earth in the midst of a violent, abused and grieving world as signs of transforming love.”

In this mission statement, the emphasis is on naming this “violent, abused and grieving world” that ought to be replaced with life-flourishing communities, based on justice and peace. The means to that end is a clear sense of call to partnership with churches and the ecumenical community in which radical and prophetic discipleship is expressed in transformative and loving action to resist, affirm, support and enable life-flourishing alternatives.

The Council for World Mission (CWM) is a worldwide partnership of 32 churches, committed to sharing their resources of people, skills, insights and money to carry our God's mission.

CARIBBEAN

- GCU** Guyana Congregational Union
UCJCI United Church in Jamaica and the Cayman Islands

AFRICA

- CCM** Churches of Christ in Malawi
FJKM Church of Jesus Christ in Madagascar
UCZ United Church of Zambia
UCCSA United Congregational Church of Southern Africa
UPCSA Uniting Presbyterian Church in Southern Africa

EAST ASIA

- GPM** Gereja Presbyterian Malaysia
HKCCCC Hong Kong Council of the Church of Christ in China
PCK Presbyterian Church of Korea
PCM Presbyterian Church of Myanmar
PCS Presbyterian Church in Singapore
PCT Presbyterian Church in Taiwan

EUROPE

- CF** Congregational Federation
PCW Presbyterian Church of Wales
PKN Protestantse Kerk in Nederland
URC United Reformed Church
UWI Union of Welsh Independents

PACIFIC

- CCCAS** Congregational Christian Church in American Samoa
CCCS Congregational Christian Church in Samoa
CUNZ Congregational Union of New Zealand
EKT Ekalesia Kelisiano Tuvalu
EPM Etaretia Porotetani Maohi
KUC Kiribati Uniting Church
NCC Nauru Congregational Church
PCANZ Presbyterian Church of Aotearoa New Zealand
UCPNG United Church in Papua New Guinea
UCSI United Church in the Solomon Islands

SOUTH ASIA

- CNI** Church of North India
COB Church of Bangladesh
CSI Church of South India
PCI Presbyterian Church of India

Foreword

Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ Jesus,

Greetings of Peace and Joy from the Council for World Mission (CWM) in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. As we enter the new year, we are still grappling with various challenges and uncertainties caused by the ongoing Covid-19 global pandemic. The Pandemic also unveiled various social, political, and economic inequalities, and we continue to struggle with the structures that create these inequalities.

Nevertheless, it is my prayer that this year be kind to us, allowing us to meet one another and worship together. As people of God and as we walk by faith, we continue to hope that the power of God's resurrection will provide us strength to overcome all these challenges.

I am pleased to present to you the '*Sundays with CWM*,' a weekly devotional booklet intended to assist you as a resource to use during your personal, family or congregational gatherings to worship God. In the context of CWM celebrating 40 years of Training in Mission (TIM) programme, this year's devotional booklet is a compilation of meditations written by the former TIM participants, most of whom are upcoming young leaders of our member churches.

As the former TIM participants, the contributors in this booklet share their faith, various missional experiences, and aspirations. I believe these meditations will help rekindle our faith and trust in the Lord. They provide us new insights and prayers for our weekly worship gatherings as we move towards transforming our families and congregations into life flourishing communities as part of the theme of our strategic framework, '*Rise to Life: Confessing witness to life-flourishing communities*.'

Keeping the ongoing pandemic and the challenges of printing and distributing the booklets in mind, we proceed with the e-booklets instead of the printed version. I would like to thank all the contributors of weekly devotions as well as our CWM staff for their commitment and hard work in bringing these devotional booklets available to all of us.

Wish you all a blessed and joy-filled year 2022.

Rev. Dr Jooseop Keum
General Secretary



January



Reflection

Jesus Christ calls us to be the light of the world

None can dispute the importance of any form of light be it a bulb, torch, lamps, sun, moon and many more. Light does not only chase away darkness but also helps in the growth of plants, other living things and many more functions. At the time of creation, 'darkness was upon the face of the deep (Genesis 1:2) until God called light into being, so the new creation involves the banishing of spiritual darkness by the light which shines in the Word. The strange thing in this passage is that God came to the same world He created, to the creatures made in His image, and yet the world did not know Him. This shows how deeply fallen human nature rejects God, and that many reject God's word and light.




Though some rejected this revelation, others received Him and thereby became children of God, through a new birth, being born of God. As many as received Him is just another way of saying those who believe in His name. Faith is described as 'receiving' Jesus.

Upon receiving Jesus as Lord and Saviour, one is given power of this light to illuminate in the darkness. The first call is to understand that Christ is to the lives of people what the sun is to the world. He is the centre and source of all spiritual light, warmth, life, health, growth, beauty, and fertility. Like the sun, He shines for the common benefit of all people on earth--for high and for low, for rich and for poor, for Jew and for Greek. Like the sun, He is free to all.

The second call is that we need to take part in illuminating the dark world which is manifested by brokenness in form of hunger, climate change, COVID-19, poverty, unemployment, teenage pregnancies, economic and political challenges. This can be done through methodologies that are meaningful and relevant in various contexts. **Amen**

Goodwin Zainga, Churches of Christ in Malawi

Prayer

-  God of light many are dark places which do not promote life-flourishing in church and society.
-  Help us to identify places of darkness with an aim of creating safe spaces for those who are hurting.
-  Revive us Lord, to be beacons of light to those who are spiritually lesser and those lacking basic necessities. **Amen**

Scripture

Matthew 2: 1- 12

Baptism of the Lord

Reflection

Jesus Christ

The event that Jesus Christ came to our side in the form of human beings, the lowest, is a great event that can demarcate history and transform history. "Christmas" is a compound word of Christ, which means "Christ", and "Mas", which means "festival". What kind of heart do we have just after Christmas? What do we have left? With the festivals of the world, colourful Christmas decorations, and the story of Santa Claus, we seem to have lost Christmas.

We have to meditate deeply on who is "Jesus Christ" who is expressed as "coming" to us, breaking away from ritualistic faith in keeping, worshiping, and attending church. According to Matthew Chapter 2, Magi who study stars came to worship him after seeing the star. Jesus, the creator God who created heaven and earth, has become the salt and light of the world, and deserves to be worshipped. What we need to look at here is that Jesus Christ is a king with all power, but he did not come to our side in the upper class and by tyranny. Jesus Christ is the king of peace, and came to us in humility.

Being in this world, Jesus became one of us. Taking on the nation and its leaders, he stood, being baptized signifies our need for repentance and the power to take action for ourselves. The world has no power over us, unless we give it. As such, in this season of baptism, we need to reflect on what God has called us to do. Putting on a new armor to fight for the oppressed and struggling. To stand up against the forces of darkness.

We, who believe, praise, and worship Jesus, must live by pioneering a new worldview and a new path according to Matthew 2:12; 'And having been warned in a dream not to go back to Herod, they returned to their county by another route.' You have to live a life of "going back home in a different way" away from the thoughts of empire, class, authority, and power fights. We have considered greed, the joy of the world, and the enjoyment of the world, and owning something as true joy of life. However, after knowing who Jesus is, we must feel joy in humility, sharing, being together, standing next to the person in need, standing next to the underprivileged, and sharing Jesus' love.

Joeun Kim, Presbyterian Church of Korea

Prayer

God of life and love, we have just ventured past the Christmas season. As we recall your birth, death and resurrection, help us also not to forget your love and desire to see us whole and to set us free. You have shown us through your baptism, that you want us to be transformed into something that would bring forth new life, a life of dignity and reflection of our habits and action towards each other. We are challenged to do great and wonderful things for you. Bless us all, and continue to walk with us as we hold you near to our hearts. To follow you, to be led by you is our desire. Amen

Reflection

Connections

I will be 60 in 2022.

TIM @ 40 sparks many memories for me using those given passages, seemingly unconnected. People paving the way to my name being put forward, without me even knowing. Being asked to describe myself, my character - and having no words or language to do that at 21.

A deep total emersion into multi-cultural, multi-racial life and issues, as a white girl who had never been abroad. Thrown into culture shock, having to admit to prejudices, racism, unconscious bias, stereotypes, whilst also recognising that, as a white person with history and baggage from a colonial English past, I still had worthy characteristics and skills to give.

Into that storm, ascribing glory to God, (and thanks to Helen Lidgett and Rev. John Slow) I was led through steep learning curves with a wonderful group who sang together, supported each other and grew together in understanding different ways and views.

Outside the group I met my husband. More turmoil and learning curves, more gracious glory and amazing experiences. With God.

At times it was so hard, but I heard the still small voice of God in prayer: fear not, for I have redeemed you. Just think how much your husband loves you - and yet I love you more. 8000 miles away from family and friends - and yet I have provided family and friends who love you unconditionally just because you are you. Learning so much from the students being taught.

I have given you a beautiful country, Guyana, as home and space and birth place of your son. Beautiful, fragile strength of Guyana - with God in every corner.

Plunged back into grey, bleak U.K, I juggled my job, a struggling child, and ill health. But with God and the support of church and family, friends, I was baptised with understanding, compassion and self knowledge. Into the depths with God and renewed, re-educated, resurrected, strengthened and sent forth to education, social care, to be honest, patient, to be with and of that community and the still quiet voice of prayer.

Do not be afraid, I am drawing all daughters and sons to me, from all the corners, by name - these were, empowering words from God to His family.

To retirement and beginning new voyages, parents as children, children as adults, moving on the journey with this world's family, with God in her family, in mission still.

Let us pray

Cheryl Bradshaw, United Reformed Church

Prayer

Our Mother Father,
In perfect harmony
With Son and Holy Spirit
In perfect harmony
With self and creation
We stand in awe
At your perfection
And in disbelief
That you still draw
Us to you
Beloved children
From all the corners
Of the earth,
A grain of sand
Amongst the others
But individually
One and known.
We praise your name
In overwhelming awe
And a simple
Thankful hug.
Amen

*Reflection***God is our only Hope**

Psalms 63:1-8 is one of the most intriguing narratives in ways that acknowledges the mighty act of God's mercy and upholds the tendency to keep this manner. David has been experiencing threats from his own son, Absalom who intended to overthrow his father from the throne. Such difficulties and hardships like this, David was fleeing to safeguard his own life- this situation allows him to rely more and more on God's guidance and provision. He is longing for his own God- knowing that nothing can defend and embrace his life besides God. His actions encoded by each verse- stating with confidence that God never changes, even in desolated and isolated places; God always listens with great concern. Additionally, part of that encoding also extends to portray another purpose of our well-being- to praise God continually with our lips, hands, souls and so on.

Therefore, the narrative itself invites each one of us to focus our attention to see how God interacts with his chosen people in times of difficulties where hope is uncertain and life is at stake. The fact is this: David's longing for God's mercy depicts the reality of human beings like us- that metaphorically refers to a spiritual thirst and hunger for God's abundance in every aspect of life. We too have been experiencing such difficult stages in life and whenever we encountered, the rising tide of fear and an increasing sense of vulnerability due to the coronavirus, act of injustices and violence, corruption in political parties and churches (just to name a few), our thirst and hunger for God's assistance is the only solution to all. Jesus affirms God's mighty act and faithfulness to the world since he lay down his life for all of us.

Teraoi Euta, Kiribati Uniting Church

Prayer

Almighty and most merciful God, our Father and Mother of all times- We praise and honor your name- knowing that your unconditional love and merciful act will never cease whenever we call out unto you. You alone are our only Hope in times of uncertainties, our Shelter in times of fear, and our Provider in times of thirst and hunger. Empower us to be channels of your mission to our neighbors, our friends and families, to maintain the goodwill of your name here and everywhere. In Jesus' name, we pray. Amen

Reflection

Love Can Save Lives

My daughter takes such joy in making gifts and cards for me. Every week she comes from school with handmade cards from folded paper. She is proud of her creations. She makes things and piles them in the room. Sometimes I get a little annoyed with all the things she stores. Gifts and cards make mess and some days I just want to say, 'no more making of gifts and cards.' But when I see my daughter's face, filled with joy because she is able to make things with her hands and present them to me, it makes it almost impossible to say no more.

My daughter says, 'Love can save lives.' She shares this thought with her classmates, friends, and teachers. Love has no limit and love never loses hope. We never lose hope or give up on the ones we love. Even though they might hurt us, still, we love them. When we think of love, we may think of our family members and friends and how much we are devoted to them. We are a part of God's family. We know how much he loves us, for though we have hurt and abandoned him, he does not throw us out of his family. God loves us not because we deserve his love, but because his nature is love. When we know this, we can have faith that we are firmly in God's family, and that gives us peace and hope.

In 1 Corinthians 13, Paul said he may have faith to move mountains, he may give everything that he has to the poor, offer his body to be burned, but if he has no love, it would all be for nothing. Paul gives us a warning, that if we do not have God's love, we are nothing and what we do, is worth nothing. So, by opening our hearts to allow God's love to flow through us, his love will make the difference in who we are and what we do.

The first letter of John (1 John 4: 9) talked about God's love. God's love for us is powerful. When we reflect on the fact that he sent his son to earth, to live and die for us, it is completely humbling and amazing. Sending Jesus was such an unselfish act of love, that we can compare it to nothing. We should practise showing love to others, just as God showed his love to us. When we show love to others, it is God, living in and through us, showing them his love. Always remember, "Love can save lives."

Orpona Murmu, Church of Bangladesh

Prayer

Lord, give us your grace, your mercy, your peace, and your love. Thank you, Lord, for constantly loving us. Thank you, God, for the faith and love of other believers whose lives have touched those who have not yet come to know you as Lord and Saviour. Lord, help us to live in Christ and continue to grow in relationship with him. Each time we fall, please help us to get up, by your love, your mercy, and your grace. Amen.

February



Reflection

Presentation of the Lord

The experience of TIM has been a life-changing journey for me. I belong to the batch of 2014. At the very beginning we all were asked to give an introduction about our nation as all of us were from 12 different countries. I go to work and started to Google some things about my country. I wanted to present my country, India in the best way possible. So I looked for all the strengths of my nations like the vast land, the diverse cultures, and the amazing history etc. When we look at the passage in Luke 2: 22-40, we see that Mary and Joseph take baby Jesus for the ritual of purification (as was the Law of Moses) to the temple. According to the law, every firstborn male was designated as holy to the Lord.

Now there was a man called Simeon in the temple. It is said about him that he was a righteous and devout man and that the Holy Spirit rested on him. It was revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not see death before he had seen the Lord's Messiah. As Mary and Joseph brought in the child Jesus, to do for him what was customary under the law, Simeon took him in his arms and praised God. And it is wonderful what he says next. I would like to point out three things that I found very enlightening. He says that after seeing this child he has seen salvation. He says that this child would be a light to the Gentiles and that this child would be a reason for many to fall and rise and a sign that will be opposed so that the inner thoughts of many will be revealed.

Simeon looks at a baby and says all these things. A child is considered to be the most vulnerable. A child is dependent on others for each and every single thing to the point that we may say to exist or to live. But God chooses and shows God's salvation in the face of this vulnerable child. God plans to bring light not only to Jews but also to Gentiles through vulnerable child and God seeks to take down the powerful and lifts up the oppressed through this child. Most of the times when we want to represent anything related to us (as in my case I wanted to represent my country as being the best in the world), we want to show our strength and our might. The world teaches us the "Survival of the fittest," which is the principle of capitalism. In this we are ready to cut the throat of our competitors. But God always shows us that true strength lies in our vulnerabilities. We look for salvation in places which have great power: the church, the Bishop, the priest, the elders. It is time that we turn our faces and look at people who are being oppressed, people who are exploited, people who are considered as failures, as powerless, as second citizens, who are outcaste. For among them shall we find salvation because God dwells between them in the dirty, smelly, manger of Bethlehem.

Priscilla Suresh Rawade, Church of North India

Prayer

Vulnerable God, we thank you for this wonderful life that you have given us. As we journey to understand you, we seek that you may guide us with your wisdom. Mold us so that we become humble to learn from each other. Give us a heart of flesh that we can feel the suffering and pain of our fellow human beings. Strengthen us as we struggle to do the little just things as we understand them. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

Reflection

The Life of Blessing

O' Blessing is the common imagery, which has been manipulated in these days to become synonymous with living long a life, with wealth, popularity, power and all other things which money can buy. At this juncture the question which we need to ponder is, what is a true blessing? The true blessing does not reside in the worldly things but it comes with trust and faith in God. That is, to search for God in our lives, to love others, and to identify yourselves among the poor, and needy and in the midst of those who are suffering. True blessedness comes from (1) faith in God, (2) love towards others, (3) honesty with ourselves, and (4) obedience towards God.

And another one is Obedience. An obedient life leads to a new assurance and new promises from God. During the time of obedience, you will face many tests and trials, and that's how your faith grows. But the same Lord who, brought you in and out throughout the pilgrim journey will also bring you through, if we follow him by faith. Abraham with his obedience, trust and love towards God lived the life of covenant blessing. He became a peacemaker not a trouble maker. Abraham even built an altar wherever he stayed. God also tested Abraham's faith, hope, trust and love. God gave Isaac as a blessing to Abraham in his old age, only to ask for Isaac back. Isaac was their only promised son, miracle child and gift of God, in response to their faith and obedience. He was obedient even to the point of sacrificing his only son, born to him at the age of 99. We must be careful that the gifts we have received from God should not take the place of God.

Abraham revered God and put Him first, and considered it as a blessing to his family and to all nations. We also should place God first in every aspect of our life. He walked by faith, was saved by faith and lived by faith and his obedience was evident by his faithfulness (James 2:23). It makes our life as blessing.

When Abraham restored the life of people and King of Sodom, the king offered him all the best things in Sodom, which could make him the richest person. But Abraham said that he doesn't want to become rich in worldly things, but in God's blessings (Gen 14:23). He refused to keep material possessions in the presence of man, but gave openly in tithe to the priest Melchizedek. He was honest and it made him to receive the true blessings from God.

Abraham lived for others. When God asked them to choose, Abraham gave the first choice to Lot. Lot had chosen the worldly possessions but Abraham looked unto God. Though three strangers came to his place, he welcomed them. Abraham service was marked with humility and hospitality; he bowed to the strangers, invited them, provided food for them and called himself a servant. For that he and his wife received tremendous blessings. The impossible became possible with his humility and attitude of service. We, too, should not live for ourselves alone, but also live with the people and for the people. Living with the people can be summarized as living in their pain, struggles, and in their vulnerabilities. It's more of a process of Empathy than Sympathy. Sharing their pain and showing empathy towards them is a real blessing in our lives. Jesus also had proclaimed that the true blessing is not a change in the circumstances but a change in their relationship with God. The attitude of Suffering for others and being helpful to others is a true blessing (James 2:15-17). But we must remember that no amount of things can be a substitute for a relationship with God. Jeremiah makes this clear that, "Blessed are those who trust in the Lord, whose trust is the Lord" (Jeremiah 17:7).

Because Abraham had followed all these three aspects of faith, his life was filled with blessings, he was called a friend of God and God also shared things with Abraham. All these happened with the trust he had in God. When we place our trust in God, show obedience and serves others, then we will also promote the God's truth.

Rev. Pushpalalitha Yeggoni, Church of South India

Prayer

Our Gracious God, the source of all blessings, accept us as we submit ourselves with broken spirits and hearts. Help us to live united and committed to be the agents of forgiveness, trust, obedience and faith. Help us retain and sustain your providential spirituality instilled in our hearts to confront the world of deterioration. Help us overcome difficult situations due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Transform us to mend our ways that we may incisively surge ahead to reclaim the vision and mission of the Church so that our life will be the channel of blessing for many. Refine, reform and renew us to be the true stewards and servants in your vineyard. In Jesus name we pray. **Amen.**

*Reflection***Re-reading turning the other cheek**

In the Old Testament, there is a strong understanding that justice is paying back what is fair and square. If one was to do violence unto you, then violence must be done unto them, an eye for an eye. The Old Testament laws focuses on “retributive justice. “ You can find examples of this in Deuteronomy 19:21, Exodus 21:22-25 and Leviticus 24:19-20. These biblical old testament laws was the norm during that time. However in Luke 6: 27-38, Jesus challenged these norms and laws. Jesus focused on what Walter Wink describes as “Doormat theology”. Often this interpretation is taken in the wrong direction and allows readers to be walked over like a “doormat”. Each verse consists of instructions of how we should respond injustice and abuse of power and violence but this reflection will be focusing on the “turning of the other cheek” found in verse 29. Let us dig deeper into the socio-economic cultural context of that time for a broader understanding.

It is important to note that the left hand was only used for “dirty jobs” such as cleaning the posterior. It was not used for any other purposes, not even to slap another. Therefore, upon slapping someone, only the right hand can be used and there are two ways of slapping with the right hand. The closed fist slap/using the open palm and right back hand slap.

The closed fist strike/slap is only used between people who are of equal status. For example, when a King strikes a king, or a slave master strikes another slave master etc. This is an indication that the striker is of equal power to the person he or she was striking.

The second type of slap which is the right backhand slap is done when someone who is perceived to be superior in status is striking someone who is inferior, a master striking a slave, a king striking his subjects, a husband striking his wife, a mother striking her child. The right backhand slap was purposely designed to inflict shame and humiliation to the one that was struck, to show who’s boss and to put the one being struck back in his or her place.

If we study Jesus’s movements and the people he associated himself with, it is very clear that the people who spent the most time with Him are people who are more likely to be the ones who are seen as inferior in their communities. Therefore, culturally speaking, if these people were to be slapped, it would be by the right backhand slap and would hit directly on their right cheek. Then Jesus said “offer the other one also” which is the left cheek.

The only other way to slap someone's left cheek with their right hand is to use the open fist slap which automatically balances the level of status and power between the person slapping and the person getting slapped. Here Jesus portrays a whole new idea of responding to violence with non-violence by devising a way for the victim to take control of the situation and deprive the striker of the power to strike again. The striker will be in a dilemma and a awkward situation of deciding whether or not to strike the left cheek and release their frustration at the expense of their superiority and power.

Of course , in our current context where these Jewish cultures do not apply to all of us, we must not take this reading literally. However follow in the examples of Jesus of not conforming to the traditional way of reacting to violence with more violence. Jesus's teaching is about power dynamics in society. Jesus emphasized how to subvert power and so that the powerful are rendered without power to control, manipulate and abuse their fellow human beings. Violence does not have to be the reaction to violence, evil does not have to be the reaction to evil, injustice does not have to be the result to injustice. We, as followers of Christ must know to take these situations of violence, evil and injustice and use the, as opportunities for empowerment and peace.

Timasi Bird, United Church in the Solomon Islands

Prayer

Citizens of the Solomon Islands who feel unrecognized, unheard and unseen by their Government thus resulting in rioting, looting and burning of their capital city Honiara. Pray for injustice to not be met with injustice, evil with evil.

Reflection

Going Down the Side of the Mountain

The Gospel of Luke begins verses 28-36 with the words ‘About a week after he had said these things’, but what are these things being referred to? We see that in the previous verses of chapter nine Jesus has sent out his disciples: He has given them power and authority to drive out all demons and to cure diseases. He sent them to preach the Kingdom of God and to heal the sick. Can imagine the disciple’s excitement as they returned from their journeys? People had been healed, demons had been cast out and everything Jesus had told them has been proven true!

From this excitement we are drawn deeper into the amazing revelation, along with the disciples that Jesus is more than he seems. Along with the disciples we witness Jesus miraculously feeding five thousand men with five loaves and two fish. We hear Peter’s declaration that, Jesus, is God’s Messiah. The culmination of what God’s people have been waiting for centuries is declared by a fisherman. With this declaration and all that the disciples have witnessed, they must have been exhilarated. Then Jesus tells his disciples about his suffering and death - exhilaration to agitation - God’s Messiah is to suffer and die?

A week after this announcement Jesus is altered on a mountain top and meets with two of the top Jewish heroes, Moses and Elijah. There must have been a roller coaster of emotions; half dreading what was around the corner and half excitedly anticipating what was around the bend. It is in the midst of these emotions, in the intersection of choice, that we find Jesus praying to his Father and the disciples, Peter, John and James fast asleep.

It is as Jesus is praying that ‘The appearance of his face changed, and his clothes became dazzling white’. The Gospel of Luke uses the word ‘altered’ to describe the change in Jesus’ appearance, whereas Matthew and Mark use the word ‘Metamorphosis’ to explain what happened. The word ‘Metamorphosis’ carries connotations of a permanent and radical alteration, as in the metamorphosis of a caterpillar into a butterfly. The use of the word ‘Metamorphosis’ could lead us to believe that the change in Jesus was similar, hence the reason for Luke simply referring to a temporary change in Jesus’ external appearance.

Luke’s use of this word is to emphasise the confirmation of Jesus’ ministry rather than the transformation or transfiguration of Jesus on the mountain. Although this alteration of Jesus was an amazing experience for the disciples, it was also the time when Jesus wrestled with which side of the mountain he would climb down. Could he, would he, travel to Jerusalem and to the mountain of his death? Of course we know the outcome, Jesus on the mountain committed himself to a course of action that would change the world forever.

In following Jesus are we committed or are we still wrestling with what it might mean to go the path God wants us on? Are we committed enough to love our neighbours? Are we committed enough to love those who aren't like us? Are we committed enough to talk about Jesus, even to those who might persecute us? Are we?

Stuart Simpson, Presbyterian Church of Aotearoa New Zealand

Prayer

Gracious God, we know that our Lord Jesus decided to continue to journey towards Jerusalem rather than take another route. We know that this decision led to his crucifixion and yet it also led to the greatest act of love and reconciliation the world has ever seen. Holy God, we know that we aren't Jesus, and yet as his disciples, we desire to follow his footsteps, which means we too have to continue the difficult journey down from the mountain top vistas to the often dark shadowed valleys. Strengthen us to love as you love, to show radical hospitality to those hard to like and forgive those who have harmed us. Help us to hold onto the truth that we do none of these things in our own power. Help us to remember that it is Jesus who has made it possible to do what seems impossible. This we pray in the name of Jesus, our Lord and Saviour. Amen



March

Reflection

To be reconciled in suffering and joy

In the letter of 2 Corinthians, Paul's harsh words shows an unsettled reconciliation of the members of the Corinthian church both to him and God. His ministry and authority were questioned by his opponents, and the Corinthian church was therefore affected. Paul hence called for the community of the Corinthian church to reconcile with God. This reconciliation was made by God through Christ (5:20), and Paul considered not only himself but also encouraged other believers to be ambassadors of Christ to fulfill this ministry of reconciliation. This reconciliation signals the union with Christ, which requires an acknowledgment on Christ's death that "one has died for all; therefore all have died." (5:14) Because Christ died for us all, "those who live might live no longer for themselves, but for him who died and was raised for them." (5:15)

Paul understood that his ministry as the ambassador of Christ was to preach the message about the cross. The interpretation of Paul's gospel on the cross gives us an insight on how the death of Christ presents the love and salvation of God for all humankind, which represents the most vulnerable and imperfect image of Christ. With the acknowledgment of Christ's suffering on the cross, Paul also showed the acknowledgment of his own cross and suffering in his life, and he encouraged other believers to not only understand the death of Christ, but also commend themselves as servants of God in every way, including in their own afflictions. (6:4)

Paul's message in 2 Corinthians is a comfort to those who are suffering as the believers of Christ: "For just as the sufferings of Christ are abundant for us, so also our consolation is abundant through Christ." (1:5). It is also a very important message for us as we start our journey on Ash Wednesday, while remembering the coming of Christ's death and suffering, we should also reflect on ourselves to be reconciled with God. Through Christ not only we share afflictions but also the salvation and joy of knowing Christ.

Huang Ching-Hao, Presbyterian Church in Taiwan

Prayer

Lord, your suffering has called for us to see the afflictions in this world. There is hunger, violence, discrimination, exploitation.... So many people are living in injustice deprived of their dignity. The afflictions are always painful to see, and your calling for us is always heavy to bear, but please give us the strength to have faith in order to move on and understand the joy in our lives through you. Amen.

*Reflection***The same Lord is Lord over all**

Today marks the First Sunday of Lent, a season of reflection and preparation for Easter, as well as an opportunity to acknowledge the faults we have and to face adversity.

Our reading from Paul's letter to the Romans today emphasizes how salvation is for everyone. Therefore, we say that Jesus is for everyone; His love, His hope, and His peace are for everyone.

The members of CWM are aware that injustices and inequalities have plagued our communities for centuries, and so often especially in the western world, scripture has been weaponized to endorse injustice by saying some are valued more than others.

As a result of the good work of the CWM and its members, we have seen inequalities and injustice highlighted so that we can correct them. CWM has brought attention to issues of gender equality and legacies of slavery and started dialogue of redemption that so many people are seeking. Some of us have been a part of the conversations while some of us have been victims.

Today marks International Women's Day in a world where gender inequalities are a daily struggle.

According to the International Women's Day website (IWD), the theme for this year is #BreakTheBias. *"A world free of bias, stereotypes, and discrimination. A world that is diverse, equitable, and inclusive. A world where difference is valued and celebrated."*

"For there is no distinction between Jew and Gentile; for the same Lord is Lord over all, and is abounding in riches for all who call on Him." Romans 10:12

In this season of Lent, it is time to reflect. It is often uncomfortable and painful to acknowledge our faults and failings, but by doing so we begin our journey to reconciliation, both with ourselves and others. By tearing down walls that divide and building bridges that embrace diversity and welcome reconciliation, we affirm that the same **Lord is Lord of all**.

Dylan Rhys Parry, Union of Welsh Independents

Prayer

Let us remember our callings and your word by remembering that you are Lord of all. We've often built walls that divide, and we've labelled and categorised people based on their appearance. Help us now to build bridges of inclusiveness with your tools of reconciliation and the foundations of your love. Amen.

Reflection

You are Citizens of Heaven

Paul is in prison writing to his beloved Philippians, who have journeyed together with him as participants of Christ's mission and the time is drawing near when Paul will magnify the Lord through his death.

On a number of occasions Paul used his Roman citizenship to buy time to preach the Gospel, now he uses his Heavenly citizenship to encourage his brothers and sisters in the Lord at Philippi.

He exhorts them in the love of Christ to stand fast in the Lord, to imitate Paul and those who witness to the example of Christ. (3:17) They are not to follow the citizens of the world, they who have made themselves enemies of Christ: they who glory in bodily desires and shame, they who have set their minds on the things of the earth, they who have chosen the road to destruction. Their perilous choices have brought Paul to tears (3:18-19), for the wages of sin is death.(Romans 6:23)

But Paul says we are citizens of heaven who eagerly await the coming of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. (3:20). Instead of perishing in a corrupted body we are transformed into the imperishable by the mighty power of God.(3:21) Paul has laid bare the stark contrast between the world and heaven and its citizens.

Then Paul makes his appeal again in the love of Christ for the Philippians to stand fast in the Lord.(4:1)

Words cannot express the value of our citizenship in Heaven, purchased at great cost for our benefit, it carries with it great privilege and responsibility; citizens are to make widely known throughout the world the citizenship of heaven.

TIM is a marvellous ingenious provision of the Lord that helps prepare young citizens for such a task. It comforts the afflicted and afflicts the comfortable.

I have learnt that the love of Christ is the motivating power in mission. Christ gives us the eyes to see the world as it really is, compassion for the lost and the determination to press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.

Roger Frost, Congregational Union of New Zealand

Prayer

We pray our Father for those who have made themselves enemies of Christ, we too were once lost and blind until the light of the gospel shone upon our hearts, so please Lord continue to show Your great mercy to those who are still held captive by the world and make them citizens of Heaven.

In Jesus' Name we pray Amen.

Reflection

The Rock

The word Rock is used in the scriptures as metaphor signifying strength, steadiness, and durability. It was used in a variety of ways, conveying an impression of the unwavering character of God as well as the need for spiritual solidarity in the foundation and structure of our own lives. Paul explained that the children of Israel under the leadership of Moses “drank of that spiritual rock that followed them: and that Rock was Christ.” (1 Cor. 10:4.)

Now, the scripture in Corinthians 10: 1-13, was written for our admonition. It tells us that they were overtaken by their idolatrous desires and sexual immorality, which had immediate consequences. Therefore God wasn't pleased with them, even though they experienced the same spiritual blessing as we did (i.e. "They all ate the same spiritual food and drank the same spiritual drink" -1 Cor 10:3-4).

These people had so much of God, and even saw God perform miracles through Moses. Imagine thousands of people with the Lord going ahead of them in a pillar of cloud by day (Exodus 13:21), experiencing the parting of the Red Sea, and being fed with manna. All these were mind-blowing, creative miracles. Yet it was easy for them to disbelieve God, forgetting what God had done for them. Christ was with them yet they didn't know.

The bible tells us that these things were examples to us, so we do not lust after evil things like they did. "Let him that thinks that he stand, let him take heed lest he falls. Sometimes we become so familiar with the things of God while serving, that we make simple his grace unto us. When you think you are the most righteous take heed because our righteousness is in Christ Jesus. Boast less of your achievement, and resist the temptation of your lustful desires, lest you prepare yourself for a downfall.

We should not glory in our own efforts to stand firm in God. Instead, we should look unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith (Hebrews 12:2), for our righteousness is through faith in Christ Jesus. (Romans 3:22) Although Christ the rock accompanied the Israelites, they were overcome by their sinful desires. This example reminds us that when we lose focus on Christ, we give room for ungodly desires to arise. Let us stand on the gospel of Christ, a rock and a sure foundation upon which we can stand firm and blameless.

Anoke Faith Blessing, The Student Christian Movement
World Student Christian Federation in Nigeria- An Ecumenical Partner



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Prayer

We believe that our firmness and righteousness in God is through faith in our Lord Jesus, and we ask that He keeps us on the right path. Preserve us until the day of His second coming.

27 Mar

Fourth Sunday in Lent

Scripture
**Joshua 5:9-12, Psalm 32,
2 Corinthians 5:16-21,
Luke 15:1-3, 11b-32. Pr 16: 18**

Reflection

Repentance Requires us to let go of our own Understanding

One of my most sobering memories of the Training in Mission experience, is having to apologise to my fellow team members. As a result of something that I unknowingly did wrong. Bringing people from 12 different countries and cultures is bound to create challenges and misunderstandings. What was okay in my context was not accepted in the other persons context. Sometimes it was my personality that came too strong for the other participants. Learning to live together as children of God required a lot of humility and repentance of my old ways. Repenting from practices that I believed to have been correct and true.

In today's reading we come across the prodigal son who believed that there was a better life outside of the one that his father was providing for him. The prodigal son believed that there was something better than what was in the household his father had provided for him. In his own judgement of the situation, he knew better, and his desires led him astray. Pride tells us that what we know is better than what the next person knows. This great sin is the reason that we often seek our own way and refuse to be corrected or advised. Pride is often the root of conflict and wars. We all seek to be correct and refuse to make room for the other person. it is the destruction of many (*Pr 16:18 esv*).

The prodigal son eventually repents and comes back home to the father where he gets a very warm welcome and a new understanding of what family and relationships is about. He repents when he comes to the realisation that he is limited in knowledge and in resources. On his own he can never make it. Upon acknowledging his iniquities and limitations begins a new place with the Father.

When we allow our self-righteousness ways to die so that the righteousness of God may take over. We position ourselves to receive renewal and reconciliation. Repentance is when we let go of our ways that we make room for God's righteousness. It is totally letting go of what we felt and believe is right to be renewed in our thinking. This letting go of our ways is the beginning of a more content life and a more God honouring life as the body of Christ.

Boitshoko Molatlhegi, United Congregational Church of Southern Africa

Prayer

Dear Lord forgive us for the times we have sought our ways above your will and purpose for our lives. Lord we confess that we have sought our own pleasure and believed that our own righteousness was what we needed to live out your assignment. From this day forward Lord, we position ourselves to follow your instruction and guidance that we may experience renewal and fullness of life.



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